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ABSTRACT

Ethnomethodological research involves participation in the field, with some degree of social interaction, with the subjects of the study; direct observation of relevant events; some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing; systematic counting; collection of documents and artifacts; and flexibility in the direction the study takes. This paper begins with criteria for the reliability, validity, and quantification of ethnomethodological research in professional education. The field training of rookie police was observed and analyzed by means of ethnomethodological research. After 16 months of observing field training instructors, it was reported that a particular body of knowledge was shared and expressed in the work of all competent members of the profession. This knowledge, composed of attitudes and skills, was demonstrated by the officers who acted as teachers and models to the probationary officers assigned to them during field training. These attitudes and skills were communicated both verbally and nonverbally. Field training officers evaluated the rookies by means of a checklist of practical job skills. (Author/BH)

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ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN THE PROFESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

The first part of this paper presents a description and definition of ethnomethodological approaches to research and evaluation. The applicability of these approaches to problems in the education of the professions is examined. Criteria for the reliability, validity, and quantification of ethnomethodological research in professional education are proposed.

Part two of the paper is a description of a specific example of ethnomethodological research. A study of police field training undertaken with a view to outlining the theoretical rationale, instructional content, and a potential evaluation instrument is analyzed. Application is made of the ethnomethodological process, i.e., analysis of observation(s) for concept(s), synthesis of concept(s) into category(ies), organization of categories into hypotheses, testing hypotheses for generalizability into theory. The results of a quantitative analysis of this study are included.

Part One

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are to define and to describe ethnomethodological research approaches, as well as to examine the applicability of these approaches to issues in the education of the professions. The bias of the paper, which should be known from the start, is less than coincidental with the fact that the writer has used these approaches in the study of education in two professions, law enforcement, and medicine.

The first part of this discussion deals with a definition and description of ethnomethodological approaches. The term "ethnomethodological" was chosen from an array of near-synonyms commonly used to describe a research strategy or style which makes use of several methods and techniques organized in a distinctive research design that is phenomenological, uses subjective measurement, and descriptive rather than inferential statistics. The other names given to this type of research design include: clinical case study, field work, qualitative research, naturalistic study, participant observation, and ethnographic research. All these terms, as well as others not listed, can be included under the generic umbrella of ethnomethodological approaches to research and evaluation. Such approaches have generally been designated as "soft" research orientations as opposed to the "harder" more quantitative experimental studies in which every effort is made to control variables and produce a research yield which is appropriate for mathematical analysis. Anderson and Ball (1978) warn of the conceptual "hardening of the categories" which is likely to result from the use of stereotypes of "hard" research and evaluation designs as opposed to "soft" ones, and one of the aims of this paper is to show that the two orientations of "hard" and "soft" need not be

antipathetical nor mutually exclusive.

Ethnomethodological research approaches originated in the field of anthropology, and are:

> Exemplified by the work of the lone anthropologist living amongst an isolated people, who is engaged in some amount of genuinely social interaction in the field with the subjects of the study, some direct observation of relevant events, some formal and a great deal of informal interviewing, some systematic counting, some collection of documents and artifacts, and openendedness in the directions the study takes. (McCall & Simmons, 1969, p. 1)

In such a research design, hypothesis generation, data gathering, and hypothesis testing are carried on simultaneously at every step of the research process, and an on-going modification of categories enables the researcher to re-fit the process to the problem on a continual basis. This constant "juggling" of the research design, along with the number and complexity of variables most often involved in the phenonmenon being studied, are two important reasons why researchers coming from more traditional experimental backgrounds are likely to "go bananas" when confronted with what appears to many as the great buzzing booming mass of confusion that is called an ethnomethodological research endeavor. But, as I hope to demonstrate, there are certain domains in which ethnomethodological approaches are particularly well suited, and education in the professions seems to be one of them.

RATIONALE

The second part of this paper enumerates three reasons which support and elaborate the foregoing conviction. First, ethnomethodological approaches are particularly useful in the study of the dynamics of a social organization or situation." (McCall & Simmons, 1969). This is so for the obvious reasons that complex systems of interlocking variables are at work in social organizations and situations. Any research methodology applied to organizational or social problems must be one which is able to contain within its framework the synergistic dynamics which make the entity or interaction "tick". The strict control of

variables in such studies would be either impossible or unrealistic. Research designs too narrowly construed would result in atomistic information where molecular in-put is needed. Education in the professions seems a specific example of this since such education constitutes a progressive initiation into roles and organizations which are characterized by a high degree of complexity. A researcher wishing to make a substantive contribution in the domain of professional education needs a large repertoire of research strategies, some of which must contain capably this high complexity so typical of contemporary organizations.

A second characteristic of ethnomethodological research which suggests it as eminently suitable for use in research of professional education is its senstivity to process as well as product. Mensh and Henry (1953) pointed out long ago the strength of direct observation over tests when "the crucial details of the way in which the autonomic and other organic systems of the population are impinged upon by the socio-cultural (and I would add educational) process." (p. 462) This sensitivity to the details of a process is of vital importance in education of the professions where we are constantly in search of the key indicators or turning points along the career road which separate the truly competent members of a profession from those who are markedly less so.

A third consideration in the application of ethnomethodological approaches to research in the education of the professions is what Zelditch (1969) names "the latent phenomenon aspect" of certain studies. He points out that since not all norms and statuses can be verbalized, the socio-cultural terrain where participants are unaware of the aspects of their environments which are shaping their behavior is the "special province in which ethnomethodological observation lays well-justified claim." In such situations neither of formal interviews nor detailed questionnaires will ever uncover relevant data about these latent

factors. The only recourse for bringing them to light is frequent and penetrating observation by a researcher who brings his skill to bear on that socio-cultural terrain. The unwritten rules of professional membership, not to mention other points where hidden agenda are active, seem to be situated in such a socio-cultural terrain.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The next section of the paper deals with the questions of reliability, validity, and quantification of research and evaluation studies which are ethnomethodological in approach. These well-known research concepts can be looked at in a somewhat different perspective when they are applied to ethnomethodological studies. The notions of reliability and validity can be related to the idea of "fit" or "congruence" of research outcomes with the phenomenon studied. This fit is essential and must be perceivable to a significant segment of the population involved either centrally or peripherally in the study. To paraphrase Anderson & Ball (1978), for most research studies or evaluations there are consumers. Any given piece of research must prove itself in the marketplace of the particular profession under study.

This should not be taken to mean that all the members of any group studied must be in total accord with the findings of the ethnomethodological researcher. But what it does mean is that a significant number of the members of the organization or profession studied must recognize substantial elements of the research outcomes as applicable to their working personalities. Without such recognition or perceived fit, the research loses, of necessity, its impact. And although one can argue the case for purely descriptive research which has little or no present applicability, such an argument would receive short shrift in environments as pragmatic as professional education. Research carried on in education for the professions is expected to have an impact, and the sooner and greater the better.

In ethnomethodological studies it is quite probable that two different researchers using the same combination of research strategies would produce somewhat different conceptual end-products. Such varying end-products would not necessarily call in question the reliability of the research design. If neither researcher, however, was able to recognize the phenomenon under study in the conceptual categories of his or her counterpart, then the degree of "fit" or reliability would be called into question. Such a variation of perspective or interpretation can be explained by the over-arching nature of ethnomethodological studies and the complexities involved therein.

More important, however, is the issue of congruence or fit in the perceptions of the individuals who make up the organization or group studied. Again, the distinction between being in total accord with a researcher's findings or liking a researcher's findings as opposed to recognizing one's working personality in the researcher's findings should be kept in mind. The latter experience is basic to establishing the reliability as well as the validity of the research design, and it provides a valuable link between ethnomethodological approaches and more quantitative research. The degree of what Bruyn (1966) call "social consensus" achieved among the group, organization,or profession studied concerning research outcomes can be quantified. And these outcomes, through dissemination, can involve other similar groups,or organizations,or members of the same profession in other settings,in the quantification process. The response, or lack of it, of these similar groups to the research outcomes in terms of recognition of their own working personalities and experiences provides further grounds for quantification and potential verification of ethnomethodological research studies. By this means such studies break through the geographical and systemic bonds which limit them to one group, organization or institution, a weakness often cited concerning non-experimental research design.

In order to make such quantification possible, the ethnomethodological researcher must give a large part of his attention to that which is generalizable

in his study while not necessarily losing sight of the particular details of a specific setting. This double perspective, if adhered to faithfully, will enable the researcher to make a significant contribution to the whole of a professional group, although he or she is studying only a small segment of it. Without such adherence to this two-fold perspective, the ethnomethodological researcher runs the risk of producing an anecdotal study which reads interestingly, which may even be recognized by members of a given professional group as matching their experience, but which adds little or no formative in-put to the group's educational process.

PART TWO

APPLICATION

The second half of this paper is a description of a specific example of ethnomethodological research applied to education in the professions. The field training of police was observed and analyzed with a view to outlining the theoretical rationale, instructional content and a potential evaluation instrument specific to the field training process.

The following paragraphs delineate: first, the objectives and perspectives of this study; second, the methods and data source; third, the results; and fourth, the educational importance of this example of ethnomethodological research.

OBJECTIVES AND PERSPECTIVES

The field training of police officers has in recent years received an increasing amount of attention as a crucial time in a probationary officer's

education. Within the rank-and-file of police departments it has long been held that the most important professional learning for the new recruit takes place on the streets rather than in the Police Academy. Both the Report of the President's Commission on Crime in the District of Columbia (1966) and the Knapp Commission Report on Police Corruption (1972) emphasized the critical nature of this period of police formation.

Efforts have begun in a small number of departments to systematize the experiences and the supervision of probationary officers during their field training. This task is a difficult one because of two factors. The first factor has to do with the skepticism so many experienced officers harbor concerning training given in Police Academies. Saunders (1970) states:

> While conflict between theory and practice is present to some extent in any kind of professional training, it is accentuated in the case of police...Perhaps the greatest difficulty is the disparity between the ethics, ideals, and theory taught in the academy and the actualities of everyday practice, which has been noted in numerous studies. Instructors who attempt to instill higher standards of professionalism are undermined by cynical veterans on the force who advise the recruit that "to become a real policeman, he will have to forget everything he is learning at the Academy." (Upgrading the American Police, p. 130).

The second factor has to do with the nature of police work itself and the lack of consensus among the members of police organizations concerning the skills that should be learned by probationary officers during the field training period. Saunders (1970) speaks of the "little agreement that exists among police agencies throughout the country on what skills and understandings are essential for the recruit, and how they can best be inculcated." (p. 121)

Wilson (1968) writes:

> The patrolman is neither a bureaucrat nor a professional, but a member of a craft. As with most crafts, his has no body of generalized, written knowledge nor a set of detailed prescriptions as to how to behave - it has, in short, neither theory nor rules. Learning in the craft is by apprenticeship, but on the job and not in the Academy. The principle group from which the apprentice wins (or fails to win) respect are his colleagues on the job, not fellow members of a discipline or attentive supervisors. And the members of the craft, conscious of having a special skill or task, think of themselves as set apart from society, possessors of an art that can be learned only by experience, and in need of restrictions on entry into their occupation. (Varieties of Police Behavior, p. 283)

Both the skepticism of experienced officers concerning education already received by the rookie, as well as the lack of agreement on detailed prescriptions of content for field training, make it difficult to systematize this important period of police formation.

What is needed is a generally agreed upon content for the field training period which is based upon qualities that both departmental and Academy supervisors, as well as rank-and-file officers, identify as essential to competent police performance. The identification of such qualities would enable a systematization and standardization of the field training period in terms of the content of the instruction, the process for communicating that content, and the evaluation of the progress of the probationary officer during his/her field training. The objectives of this research study were to address the needs for a systematic content, instructional process, and evaluation instrument of police field training.

METHODS AND DATA SOURCE

The methods of data gathering in this study were ethnomethodological. As a civilian educational psychologist interested in the content and process of the apprenticeship phase of police training, I spent sixteen months riding with the experienced men who had been designated as Field Training Instructors by one middle-sized department (approximately 500 members). I observed them as they "broke in" probationary officers. The observations made increasingly clear that the F.T.I.'s (Field Training Instructors) were evaluating the performance of the probationary officers assigned to them on a level quite different from the one on which the evaluation form for recording the progress of the rookies had been designed. The F.T.I.'s were evaluating the rookies in terms of the "common sense" that they displayed in their first street experiences. The evaluation form, a fourteen page enumeration of over a hundred items about which the rookie's progress, or lack of it, was to be recorded, concentrated on the mechanics level of police performance. This level, encompassing manifold tasks and skills, while important to competent police performance, is mastered with time and frequency of use. The F.T.I.'s whom I observed pursued their own inner evaluation at quite another level than the one on which the evaluation form had been designed. They evaluated their rookie's performance in relation to the "common sense" that he/she exhibited while performing duties.

An analysis of what is meant by experienced police officers when they speak of "common sense" was carried out during 238 hours of riding with F.T.I.-rookie pairs during their tours of duty. What emerged from the observations was a three-tiered perspective on police field training which revealed teaching and learning taking place at three different levels. The first and most superficial level was that termed the "mechanics" level. The second and deeper

level was that called "style" and the third and most fundamental level was that of "survival". "Common sense" appeared to be almost exclusively related to the teaching and learning concerning survival. It also turned out to be defineable and, to a large extent, teachable. The attitudes and skills seem to constitute the cognitive and motivational scaffolding of the profession. This level appears to bridge the gap between supervisory and Academy preoccupations with training, and the extremely pragmatic perceptions held by rank-and-file personnel concerning what rookies must learn to perform their duties competently. Both groups recognize the basic quality of these survival behaviors and agree that probationary officers in order to be successful as policemen/policewomen must acquire these attitudes and skills. Because of the action-oriented nature of these qualities, they seem ideally suited as the content for the field training segment of police formation.

RESULTS

The study resulted in a conceptualization of police field training from the perspective of three levels. The first level, the most extensive and detailed, is the level of mechanics. This level encompasses the nuts and bolts of police procedure. It is subject to modification through changing legal or departmental regulations or emphases. It is limited in its generalizability because of procedural variations from region to region and department to department. It is important that rookie officers become familiar with all the skills involved in the mechanics of police performance. But this familiarity takes time to acquire, more time than is usually alloted to the field training segment of police formation, and the sum of these skills when they are acquired do not constitute competent police performance. As such the mechanics level of instruction is inadequate as the content structure or the evaluation tool for field training experiences.

The second level, considerable less extensive and more generalizable within police practice, is the level of "style". Traditional categorizations of policing styles (Blanton, 1964; Wilson, 1968) delineate in broad terms, the work orientation of officers, e.g., the social agent, the watchman, the law enforcer and the crime fighter. The field training segment of police formation is characterized by the rookie's first in-depth exposure to the style of the experienced officer who is his/her F.T.I.. The style that the rookie will later develop on his/her own will be influenced to some and perhaps to a large extent by the styles he observes exhibited around him/her during his/her apprenticeship on the force. Attention must be given by supervisors to provide probationary officers with exposure to a number of experienced officers whose differing styles are all approved by the department. Moreover, beyond the scope of field training but of equal importance for the long term psychological survival of the new recruit as an effective member of the force is the necessity of developing a style of his/her own, one that is characteristic of his/her job performance and approved by his/her department. This process is begun in field training but takes a considerable time on the force before it is completed.

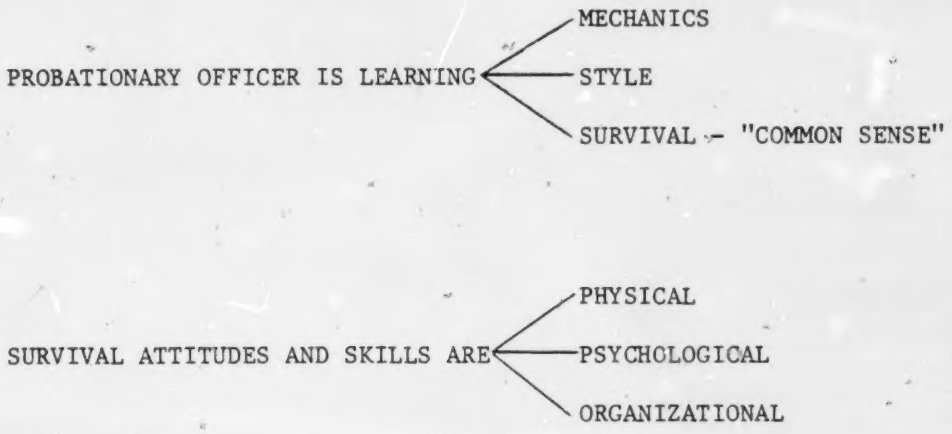
But it is the third level, the level of survival, which is of the greatest importance in the field training of apprentice officers. It is the attitudes and skills appropriate to this level which constitute the global designation "common sense" within police circles. The underlying attitudes and skills which are the component parts of police common sense have been so internalized by experienced officers that they remain in many instances unverbalized or at least ungeneralized in their teaching of rookies. Corrective feedback in terms of specific examples of the mistakes that rookies have made in their job performance are pointed out to them by experienced officers, but the underlying attitude or skill that must be learned and adapted to all instances is rarely formulated in such feed-back. This is due to the internalization by experienced

officers of fundamental attitudes and skills characteristic of the policeman's craft. Such internalization explains heavy reliance on highly inferential terms such as "common sense" and "good judgment" used in the evaluation of rookies by their Field Training Instructors.

The analysis of the largely non-verbal and ungeneralized attitudes and skills encapsulated in police common sense pin-point seventeen qualities fundamental to police survival. These qualities enable the individual officer to survive physically, psychologically, and organizationally. (Figure One). The attitudes and skills essential to survival in these areas are enumerated along with their definitions. (Figure Two)

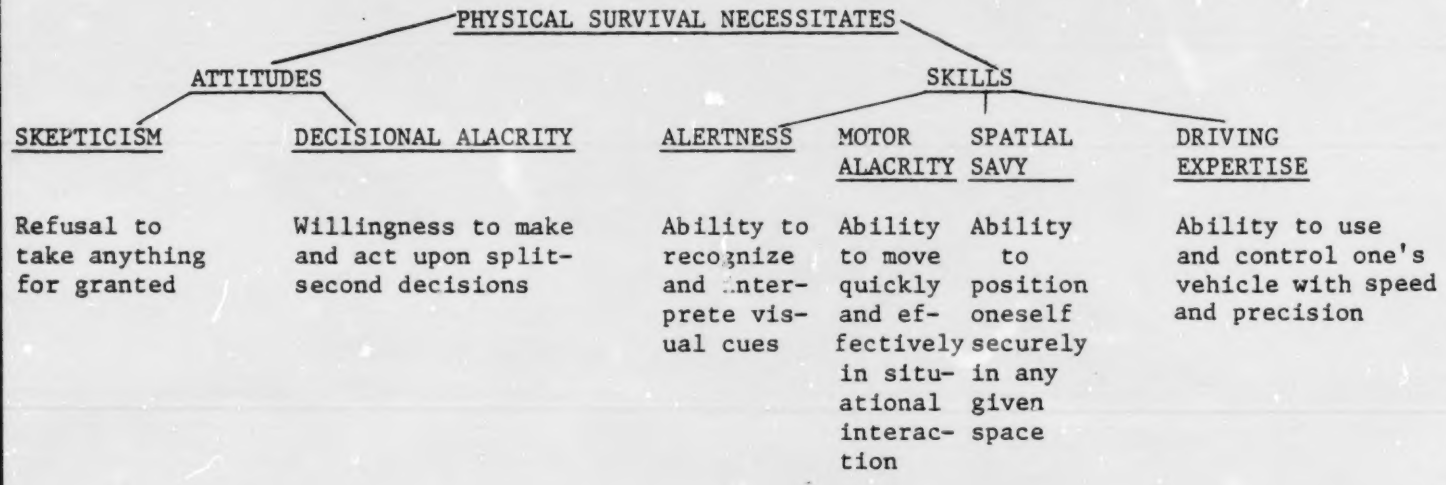
ANALYSIS OF POLICE FIELD TRAINING

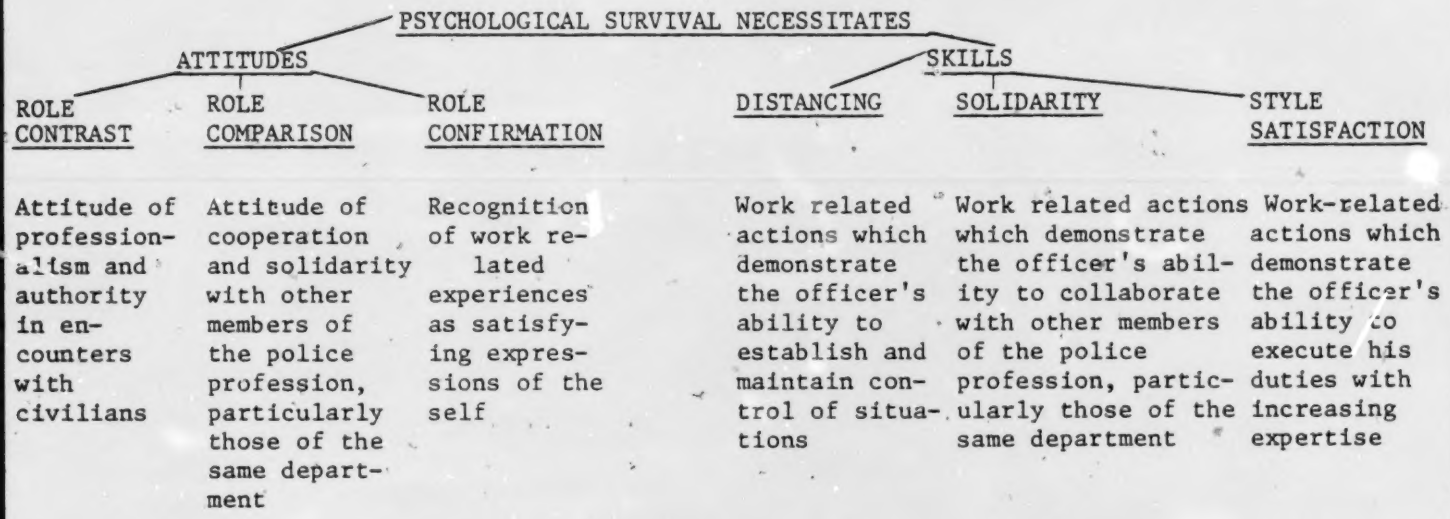
FIGURE ONE

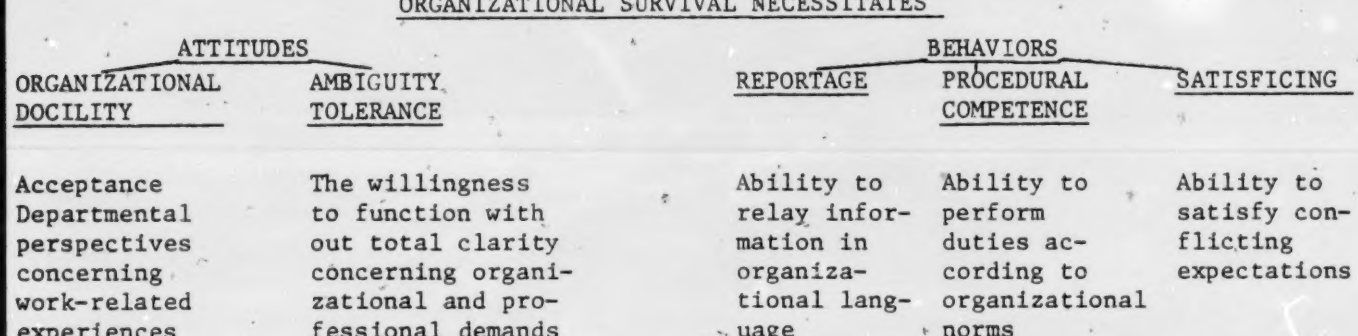


ANALYSIS OF POLICE FIELD TRAINING

FIGURE TWO


PHYSICAL SURVIVAL NECESSITATES
ATTITUDES
SKILLS
SKEPTICISM
DECISIONAL ALACRITY
ALERTNESS
MOTOR ALACRITY
SPATIAL SAVY
DRIVING EXPERTISE
Refusal to take anything for granted
Willingness to make and act upon split-second decisions
Ability to recognize and interprete visual cues
Ability to move quickly and effectively in situational interaction
Ability to position oneself securely in any given space
Ability to use and control one's vehicle with speed and precision


PSYCHOLOGICAL SURVIVAL NECESSITATES
ATTITUDES
SKILLS
ROLE CONTRAST
ROLE COMPARISON
ROLE CONFIRMATION
DISTANCING
SOLIDARITY
STYLE SATISFACTION
Attitude of professionalism and authority in encounters with civilians
Attitude of cooperation and solidarity with other members of the police profession, particularly those of the same department
Recognition of work related experiences as satisfying expressions of the self
Work related actions which demonstrate the officer's ability to establish and maintain control of situations
Work related actions which demonstrate the officer's ability to collaborate with other members of the police profession, particularly those of the same department
Work-related actions which demonstrate the officer's ability to execute his duties with increasing expertise


ORGANIZATIONAL SURVIVAL NECESSITATES
ATTITUDES
BEHAVIORS
ORGANIZATIONAL DOCILITY
AMBIGUITY TOLERANCE
REPORTAGE
PROCEDURAL COMPETENCE
SATISFICING
Acceptance Departmental perspectives concerning work-related experiences
The willingness to function with out total clarity concerning organizational and professional demands
Ability to relay information in organizational language
Ability to perform duties according to organizational norms
Ability to satisfy conflicting expectations

The foregoing framework is the outcome of the ethnomethodological process. This process begins with the observed "slice of life" or vignette which the researcher analyzes for concepts. A collection of these concepts are then synthesized into a category or categories, which are in turn organized into a hypothesis or hypotheses. These hypotheses may then be tested for their generalizability into theory.

A demonstration of the process proceeds along the following lines. First an observed event:

> The young officer was just returning to the Sandcroft station at the end of the day watch. A Sergeant standing in the station lot greeted him with a grin and the question, "Well, Taylor, how many crooks did you catch?" "A whole bunch, Sarg," the younger officer quipped back. "I had to draw my gun and hold them at bay." "Yeah? Now I know you're kidding," responded the Sergeant. "You draw that gun, boy, and you'll be off the force the next day," said the Sergeant, switching to another type of banter, half-serious, half in jest. "Just remember what your job is. We do public relations, understand? P.R. is our job, and don't you forget it."

The analysis of this event, and others similar to it, gave rise in the present study to the concept of ambiguity tolerance. This concept, defined as "the willingness to function without total clarity concerning organizational and professional demands," was, along with the concept of "organizational docility," synthesized into the attitudinal category of "organizational survival." The attitudes and behaviors of "organizational survival" form a part of the larger framework which delineates the three-fold survival concerns or "common sense" of police professionals.

The foregoing analysis has been confirmed in its accuracy and applicability to competent police performance in general and to the field training experience in particular through statistical analysis of questionnaire responses obtained from a sample of 112 experienced officers. The officers involved in the sample represented 9 other departments in addition to the department that had been involved in the research study. The questionnaire asked for

reactions as to the importance of the seventeen attitudes and skills for the competent performance of police work by experienced officers and for the training of probationary officers. A high degree of statistical significance (.05 to .01) concerning all of the qualities was indicated through the consensus of the officers responding to the questionnaire.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of this research has specifically to do with the field training experience although it has other more general applications for police training as a whole. First and foremost, it has been accepted, to the limited extent that it has been disseminated, by both rank-and-file officers as well as supervisory and Academy personnel, as relevant and basic to competent police performance.

Thus it bridges to a significant extent the gap between these two groups concerning the theory and practice of police performance as it is expressed in training situations. As such it provides the structure for the content as well as the evaluation of field training experiences. It is my contention that whatever the variety of check lists or performance sheets being used in departments across the country to evaluate the progress of probationary officers during field training, the actual assessment of the rookie's potential is being made by his Field Training Instructor on the basis of many of the attitudes and skills behind what the F.T.I. refers to as "common sense".

The analysis of police common sense, then, provides a theoretical rationale, an instructional content, and an evaluation tool for the field training segment of police formation. The rationale makes explicit the fact that there is a body of knowledge shared and expressed in the work of all competent members of the policeman's craft. The body of knowledge composed of attitudes and skills is demonstrated in the behavior of competent police officers who act as teachers and models in relation to the probationary officers assigned to them during the

period of field training. The instructional content of that period is the communication through verbal and non-verbal means of these identifiable attitudes and skills which are fundamental to competent police behavior. The evaluation instrument of the field training period is a check list of these attitudes and skills where notations are made about the probationary officer's progress in demonstrating these qualities.

The theoretical rationale, instructional content, and evaluation tool contained in this analysis should encourage and facilitate the efforts of police departments across the country, whatever their size, location, or priorities, to systematize and standardize the crucial process of police field training.

CONCLUSION

This research is a specific example of the outcomes of ethnomethodological approaches to the study of education in the professions. The conceptualization developed through the research offers certain points which are generalizable to professions other than the police. But it is above all the methodology used in the analysis of a specific instance of professional apprenticeship which constitutes the educational importance of this study.

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